

## RELIGION AND MODERN EDUCATION

*Class address delivered by J. L. Gillin at Ashland, June 4, 1902.*

An old proverb says, "Ignorance is the mother of superstition" and another has it that "Ignorance is the mother of impudence." Common observation has often witnessed to the truth of both. Ignorance in any affair of life is productive of folly, but in religion it is especially foolish. There has always been the sharpest contrast between the ignorant and the educated man in the church and there always will continue to be. Not in zeal or in earnestness of purpose, perhaps, but in efficiency. Peter had as much zeal as Paul, but the unlearned fisherman had to take a second place to the educated tent maker. Moses and Paul, each the greatest in the old and new dispensations respectively, leaving our Lord the greatest of all out of account of course, were educated men; the one "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians", the other the pupil of the great Gamaliel. Peter was sufficient to lead the church to the point where the world-wide vision of Christ's kingdom must be learned by the church. Then God sent Paul the scholar to blaze a path thru the trackless forests of heathendom and to teach the church that Christianity was not a mere sect of Judaism but a religion with a new message and a world-wide mission. It was he who put meaning into such words of Jesus as "Go ye into all the world and disciple all nations." It was he who gave shape to the theology of all the Christian centuries. It was he who gave that great spiritual and intellectual direction to the churches throbbing life, thought and vision which has made it the world-wide religion. And in all the ages of the church's history that story has been repeated over and over again. The first theological school was at Alexandria, Egypt to whose scholars we owe almost all we know of the history of those early times immediately succeeding the Apostolic Age. To the Monastic schools of the Middle Ages we owe the preservation of all the ancient learning which has survived those times of dense ignorance and of political and moral upheaval. The reformation under Luther characterized by one as "The greatest religious event since the advent of Jesus Christ" was the child of the Renaissance or Revival of learning. The Wesleyan reformation in England, that movement which saved the church of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from spiritual death was born in the room of John and Charles Wesley at Oxford University. To whom does the English reformation owe its origin? To Wycliffe, Erasmus, and Tyndale, men who had drunk long and deeply at the fountain of learning. And whence comes the Dunkard Church? Was it fathered by ignorant men? Any one who will take the trouble to read the writings of Alexander Mack will readily understand that for his day he was a learned man, especially in the line of church history. Had it been otherwise the peculiar doctrines of

triune Immersion, the Lord's Supper, Feet washing, Non-resistance and Affirmation would not have stood the tests of criticism and come forth triumphant under the searching light of this century as they have. He knew whereof he affirmed. He had ransacked the learning of the ages before him. And is it only a coincidence that the marvelous growth of Dunkardism in this generation is contemporary with the growth of education among them? Without detracting in the least from the glorious work of the thousands in every land and clime who, tho unlearned, have done mighty works for God and known the joys of sacrifice and service it yet remains true that in the history of the church the reformations, the great movements for betterment have been led and the great wide reaching visions of the church have been given her by men with not only consecrated but trained minds. Is it accidental? I think not.

Just at this point I desire to prevent any false inferences that might be drawn from what I have said. I would not be understood as thinking that education is the only prerequisite to successful work. There are two extremes each to be equally avoided.

The one is based on the assumption that education should occupy the primary place in preparation for Christian work, that religion is a thing of the intellect and that given education the rest will follow. The other is that if a man has religion he has all that is necessary to equip him for the work God has for him to do, no matter what it may be. The one produces the coldly intellectual man whose emotions have been stifled and whose conscience atrophied; the other casts all culture to the wind, declares that the grace of God is sufficient equipment for any Christian and that education hinders rather than helps the man's Christian efficiency. Both these views are unbalanced. Each is a view of one side only of the shield of truth. And, as so often, the truth lies in the golden mean between the extremes. It certainly ought to be evident that learning without religion leads to fruitlessness. Education must be controlled by religion and religion should be guided by education. Education without religion is a corpse. It is bloodless, lifeless, cold. It has no smile, no light in its eye and if you touch its hand no warm pulse is there but the clamminess and chill of death. Religion is the life pulsing thru the body which puts color in the lips and cheek, a smile on the face, a light in the eye, "such as never was on land or sea," vigor in the whole body and sympathy and love and cheer. Religion gives the hand its warmth and makes of the otherwise dead body a smiling, speaking loving sympathetic friend. Education without religion is a lifeless corpse, a thing of decay fit only for the grave. Religion without education is a disembodied spirit wandering over the earth and thru the clouds, "seeking rest and finding none," frightening timid women and children and superstitious men, and disgusting thinking

minds with its crude, lawless and irrational vagaries.

## AN IRRATIONAL RELIGION

Religion to command the attention of men and women today must satisfy not only their emotions but also their intellects. We are living in a day of intense mental activity, our public schools, our colleges and universities are teaching the latest results of investigation and thought. They are taught in these schools to trust their reasoning processes. On the essential trustworthiness of these all our knowledge is based. What then must be the result if the Christian religion is presented to people so trained in a way which leads them to suppose that it is essentially unreasonable and not amenable to the ordinary tests of truth? No other result than disbelief can follow. I submit that one of the reasons why men and women today are leaving the Christian church and religion out of account in their lives is simply because they cannot assent to it in the form in which it is often presented. That is not the only reason but it plays a part in the apathy of today. Hard-headed business men and professional men trained in the schools to believe in the trustworthiness of their reasoning faculties are slow to give assent to religion when presented by the men whose education has been such as to leave them unacquainted with the ways in which men get at the truth of things in other affairs. An irrational religion may suit the ignorant, but it can never command the assent of those who reason. For however true it is that religion is a matter of the heart it is first a matter of the head. It can reach the heart only thru the head and if it proceeds to reach it thru any other channel it must fail. The old advice to ministers is, "Don't bait your hook with a fellow-worm," but for the good of the cause I cannot refrain from saying that too many ministers have not enough training in literary matters to enable them to interpret the Bible correctly and too many laymen have so little education that they cannot tell when a man is giving a right interpretation of a passage. Hence the large number who can be found to believe that anything and everything can be proved from sacred Scriptures. A man can start out with almost any absurd claim today from that of Mormonism to that of Elijah the Second and find people who will honestly believe in him as sent from God. Therefore there is an imperative necessity for our preachers especially to be acquainted with the religion of Jesus Christ as a reasonable religion. And further the fact that almost any ism will find followers from among our people shows the necessity for a larger education of our laymen in order that they may think for themselves. An irrational religion will find no followers when people shall have become convinced of the fact that religion must stand the same tests as any other object of thought.

## AN IRRELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Bad as is an irrational religion an irreligi-